



Washington, D.C. 20505

**Georgia: New Drive For Self-Determination**

28 August 1989

**Summary**

The bloody conclusion of last April's demonstrations in Tbilisi has radicalized most Georgians. Broad segments of Georgian society, including many republic party officials, have come to deem autonomy for Georgia essential, and even the case for independence receives a serious hearing.

- o The organized nationalist groups in the republic, who advocate complete independence for Georgia, currently have the emotional backing of working class Georgians, many of whom are partially motivated by a desire to curtail the rights of smaller ethnic groups.
- o A growing group of moderate intellectuals, however, reportedly are trying to steer influential groups like the newly-formed popular front in a more moderate direction, arguing that complete independence is unrealistic.
- o The moderates may have the backing of the Georgian party, which appears to be moving to adopt a platform calling for greater political and economic autonomy within the context of the Soviet system.

Over the short term, the republic is likely to remain tense, with nationalist sentiment fanned by sporadic interethnic violence. Georgian suspicion of the central leadership is likely to persist and may even be exacerbated by the upcoming USSR Central Committee plenum on nationalities and by the release of the Congress of People's Deputies report on the April killings. The republic party will continue to work to convince Georgians that it represents their interests, although it is unlikely to take stances that will throw it in conflict with the central leadership. For its part, Moscow probably is prepared to accede to the Georgian party's demands for greater political and economic autonomy as long as they are not tantamount to full independence. [redacted]

This typescript memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Office of Soviet Analysis, with a contribution from [redacted] SOVA, and [redacted] Office of Leadership Analysis. Questions and comments are welcome and should be directed to Chief, [redacted]

APPROVED FOR  
RELEASE DATE:  
29-Mar-2010

SOV M 89-20056

### The Georgian Public's View

Last April's killings of 21 demonstrators are still virtually an obsession throughout the Georgian republic. [redacted] the universal Georgian custom of ritual toasts has now come to include a toast to the April 9 victims. [redacted]

Sensational rumors and conspiracy theories now characterize Georgian discussion of interethnic issues in general and of the killings in particular:

- o Despite the findings of a Georgian Supreme Soviet commission made up of respected citizens, many Georgians still insist that the death toll was far greater than 21, the official toll.
- o Well-educated Georgians with connections to the republic party have told visitors that a special division of orphans trained to show no mercy carried out the massacre.
- o Moscow, according to many Georgians, has engineered the Abkhazian drive for secession from Georgia in hopes of stifling Georgia's push for greater autonomy.

o [redacted]

Prior to the Tbilisi deaths, Georgians saw two longterm threats to their culture and their republic's future--cultural assimilation by Russia and political disintegration brought on by increasingly assertive Muslim minorities. Since the massacre, however, Georgians increasingly believe that they must fight for survival--a conviction that almost certainly contributed to the most recent round of Georgian-Abkhazian violence (see Annex 1). Since the 9 April events, most Georgians have come to view autonomy within the Soviet system or independence for their republic as essential. No consensus, however, has emerged on how to proceed. The organized nationalist groups favor complete independence, which has the emotional backing of the working class (particularly if it limits the prerogatives of smaller minorities); the moderate intelligentsia advocates a gradual move to political and economic autonomy within the Soviet system. [redacted]

[redacted] the major organized nationalist groups--including the various branches of the Il'ya Chavchavadze Society, the National Democratic Party, and the National Independence Party--have enjoyed a tremendous surge of popularity since the killings in April. Their leaders, particularly Zviad Gamsakhurdiya, Merab Kostava, and Georgiy Chanturiya, enjoy personal popularity that has contributed to the appeal of their organizations. The nationalist groups have been able to muster support for rallies, demonstrations, and strikes; according to press reports,

demonstrations of up to 20,000 people have been taking place regularly in Tbilisi since late July, with marchers opposing Abkhazian secession and displaying banners for Georgian independence. [redacted] small hunger strikes calling for Georgian independence are taking place in towns across the republic, emulating nationalist leaders who have struck in the past. [redacted]

The republic party has treated the major nationalist groups with some caution since April, probably both out of a fear of creating martyrs and in an attempt at conciliation. All the nationalist leaders imprisoned after 9 April were released in May, and a Georgian Supreme Soviet commission studying the events surrounding the April killings publicly vindicated nationalists' behavior during the demonstrations. Nationalist leaders appear confident that the republic party will not interfere with them again for fear of arousing public ire. They probably believe that the republic party's fear of another outburst of popular unrest also led it to grant permission for the creation of a Georgian popular front, which held its first meeting in late June. [redacted]

All the major Georgian nationalist groups currently favor complete independence for Georgia. [redacted] Leading nationalists have called for a United Nations investigation of events in Georgia and a repudiation of the treaty that created the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in December 1922. Since their release, nationalist leaders have turned the conflict between Georgians and Abkhazians over the issue of Abkhazian secession from Georgia into an issue of Georgian self-determination, believing that Georgia is under threat from Islamic fundamentalism exported from Iran. [redacted]

So far the major nationalist groups have relied heavily on strikes, and on the threat of strikes, to emphasize political demands. [redacted]

Georgian railroad workers struck during the most recent round of Georgian-Abkhazian violence to support demands that Abkhazian party leaders be fired. We do not have sufficient information, however, to judge if these strikes represent steps in a coordinated strategy. [redacted]

Working class Georgians appear to form the greatest potential base of support for the radical nationalists, as well as the instrument of strikes. [redacted]

[redacted] working class Georgians are eager to express their emotional nationalism, emphasizing their willingness to die for Georgian independence. While such statements probably contain some posturing, well-organized nationalists probably can tap into this vein of emotionalism. Working class Georgians also express the greatest hostility toward smaller minorities in the republic, a proclivity the radical nationalists have exploited. [redacted]

Despite their current ardent support for independence, working class Georgians have yet to organize effectively on their own. Their lack of political sophistication--they appear to have only imprecise conceptions of what independence entails--currently makes them susceptible to extremist rhetoric. Nevertheless, their support for the organized nationalist groups could wane if they gained confidence in the republic party or

particularly if their sense of threat from smaller nationalities diminished. Moreover, it is unclear whether working class hostility over ethnic issues will work to the advantage of the nationalist groups, who have been unable to control the repeated outbreaks of violence. Working class vigilantes, not nationalists, for example, probably were responsible for initiating violence against Abkhazians in July--a step that some nationalists probably saw as counterproductive. As early as June, a Georgian nationalist [REDACTED] that violent conflicts between ethnic groups could lead to curfews and martial law throughout Georgia. [REDACTED]

A growing group of moderate intellectuals, many previously apolitical people who have been galvanized by the April killings, want Georgia to achieve the right to determine its own future and aspire to greatly expanded political and economic autonomy within the Soviet system. Many of these intellectuals look to the Baltic republics for models of how to pursue Georgian self-determination. Members of the Georgian popular front attended the assembly of the three Baltic popular fronts that took place in Tallin in May, according to press reports. Baltic delegates to the Congress reportedly advised Georgian delegates on strategy and tactics during the Congress. Unlike the Baltic popular fronts, however, most Georgian moderates currently fall short of advocating full separation from the USSR, telling Western visitors that full independence for Georgia is economically unrealistic and strategically risky. [REDACTED]

The moderate intellectuals reportedly are trying to counter the radical influence of the nationalist groups. [REDACTED] these intellectuals made a point of participating in the first meeting of the newly-formed Popular Front in order to steer the front in a more moderate direction. [REDACTED]

The moderates in Tbilisi--taking their cue from the Balts--appear to be developing a more sophisticated strategy than the radical nationalists. Over the short term, the intelligentsia is likely to focus on specific issues surrounding the 9 April killings. They are likely to lead the drive to bring criminal charges against former Transcaucasus Military District commander General Rodionov for his role in ordering the attack on 9 April, as well as the campaign to strip him of his seat at the Congress of People's Deputies. [REDACTED]

Over the longer term, they probably will work at the national and republic level to build a climate favorable to greater Georgian autonomy. One Georgian delegate to the Congress of People's Deputies told the Soviet press after the Congress was over that the Georgian delegation to the Congress might have erred in pressing so fast for the formation of an investigative commission. He speculated that if the delegation had waited until later in the Congress, it might have been able to draw more attention to Georgian hopes for autonomy, not just to the April events. In addition, they probably will involve themselves in efforts by the republic party and by private citizens, as reported in the Soviet press, to increase Georgia's economic autonomy and trade with the West. They are also likely to try to convince the republic party to call for greater political autonomy from Moscow. [REDACTED]

Implications: for the Georgian Party...

The 9 April killings seriously undercut Georgian confidence in both the republic and national Communist parties. Despite this, many Georgians reportedly still hope that the republic party can be co-opted to represent their strivings for autonomy. The Georgian party has undergone a sweeping turnover of the party apparatus since April, with virtually the entire top leadership being replaced. (see Annex 2.) Under its new leadership, the Georgian party, still smarting from Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's criticism that it was out of touch with the people, has moved to adopt increasingly pro-nationalist positions.

[redacted]

The party cooperated fully in the Georgian Supreme Soviet investigation of the April deaths--a move that has been praised even by nationalist groups--and has been sensitive to popular opinion since the killings. For example, [redacted] the Georgian Central Committee, in response to complaints about produce shortages, passed a resolution in June forbidding the private export of produce until the Georgian plan had been fulfilled. The new Georgian first secretary, Givi Gumbaridze, has already permitted a previously forbidden degree of display of national sentiment in Georgia, including the celebration for the first time of Georgia's former National Day in May. The salience of "Georgianness" in politics probably has stiffened the republic party's resistance to Abkhazian secession and opposition to the resettlement in Georgia of Meskhetians (deported by Stalin from Georgia during World War II) from Uzbekistan.

[redacted]

The party's strategy may be working; nationalists worry that the republic party is escaping blame for its actions in April. [redacted] Gumbaridze already enjoys a fair degree of popular confidence. His strong speech at the Congress of People's Deputies condemning the April deaths reportedly won him praise in Tbilisi, and Georgians reportedly do not hold his four-month stint as republic KGB chief against him.

[redacted]

Many Georgian party members, encouraged by Gumbaridze's leniency, are exhibiting stronger nationalist sentiments. Many party officials share public outrage over the April killings and have not hesitated to tell Western visitors of their desire for greater Georgian self-determination. There appears to be impetus from within the party--encouraged by moderate intellectuals and radical nationalists alike--to begin seeking greater political and economic autonomy from Moscow. In July a Georgian Council of Ministers commission began discussing a draft plan for Georgian economic autonomy. [redacted] in late May Georgian officials presented a Western delegation with a range of joint venture proposals [redacted] described as clearly designed to help Tbilisi seek economic autonomy from Moscow.

[redacted]

...And For Moscow

President Gorbachev appears to be personally angered by the disturbances, both nationalist and ethnically motivated, in Georgia and has cited the situation there as a serious threat to his reform program. His speech to the Georgians calling for calm after the killings was notable for its angry and forceful tone. Georgian deputies to the Congress of People's Deputies, in an audience with Gorbachev, reportedly received a stiff

lecture from him on the trouble that they were causing him and the country. Gorbachev also was said to accuse them of being anti-Russian, a charge that one deputy of Russian descent hotly denied. [REDACTED]

Gorbachev's concern stems in part from the violence in Abkhazia and also from the high level of international attention drawn to the republic by the killings and the perception, internationally and domestically, that Russian troops crushed peaceful minority demonstrators. Moscow's principal worries, however, probably are the prospect of continued communal violence between Georgians and Muslim minorities and the possibility of radical nationalists playing up interethnic issues in Georgia to organize paralyzing demonstrations for Georgian independence. Moscow probably is prepared to tolerate increased demands by the Georgian party for political or economic autonomy--provided that they proceed at a measured pace and do not approach de facto independence. Indeed, Moscow probably is pleased that the Georgian party has taken some steps, such as permitting the formation of a popular front, to accommodate Georgian nationalists and moderates, perceiving such steps as inherently stabilizing. [REDACTED]

The central leadership has been able to ignore or slough off most criticism so far of its role in the April events, in part by simply failing to publicize the issue on a national level. Moscow has taken some steps to assuage Georgian indignation over the killings, such as moving General Rodionov out of the Transcaucasus Military District to head the Frunze Military Academy--a clear step down for him. Nevertheless, the findings of the Congress of People's Deputies commission investigating the killings will undoubtedly receive nationwide coverage; Gorbachev himself told the Congress that the commission would pursue the investigation no matter where the evidence might lead. The central leadership undoubtedly fears that, spurred on by the Georgian Supreme Soviet commission report, the Congress commission will demand a more thorough investigation of the role of Politburo members in the period leading up to the violence and that the commission will press for criminal charges against General Rodionov--a political as well as a military problem. [REDACTED]

#### Outlook

Over the short run, Georgia will remain tense. Desire for autonomy or independence will stay foremost in Georgians' minds, held there by memories of the April killings and the political aspirations of Georgian nationalists.

- o The result probably will be more pro-independence demonstrations in Tbilisi. Demonstrations are likely to remain peaceful as long as the police do not step in. The republic party is unlikely to intervene, particularly in light of new laws on dissent that remove legal sanctions for peaceful expression of anti-Soviet sentiment. Such expression was the catalyst for the military action in April.
- o There remains a good chance of more interethnic violence in Georgia in upcoming months, particularly in Abkhazia but also possibly involving Muslim Adzhars and Azeris in eastern and central Georgia. The

substantial security presence in Abkhazia and efforts by Tbilisi to clear out corrupt local MVD forces will improve the government's chances of maintaining public order, but even these measures may not prevent flareups.

- o Interethnic tensions are unlikely to disrupt the entire republic, although they probably would bring on fresh demonstrations in Tbilisi. If, however, Georgians become convinced that there is a serious chance that Abkhazians will escape unpunished for attacks during the last round of violence or that Moscow may permit the Abkhaz ASSR to secede, protest strikes could spread republic-wide. [redacted]

The republic party will be compelled to walk a difficult tightrope. It is likely to stand strongly behind popular sentiment in opposing Abkhazian secession and the return of Meskhetians to Georgia, but will have to be firm in maintaining public order to avoid censure from Moscow. The republic party's handling of nationalist and interethnic issues will be important in determining whether or not popular opinion swings solidly behind radical nationalists. If the republic party, with the encouragement of moderate intellectuals, chooses to adopt a gradualist strategy for self-determination and succeeds in convincing the Georgian working classes that it represents their interests, most Georgians probably will be willing to accept autonomy within the Soviet system under the stewardship of the Georgian party, at least for now. Some Georgians, however, will look on autonomy within the Soviet system as a stepping stone to full independence, a position that the republic party does not yet appear ready to support. [redacted]

Over the next six months, it will be difficult for Moscow to improve its current standing in Georgia. Bitterness over the April killings runs deep and is likely to color Georgians' perceptions of any concessions by Moscow. For example, they have not been willing so far to give Moscow credit for its longstanding rejection of Abkhazian demands for secession, and are unlikely to change their stance in the near future. [redacted]

The USSR Central Committee plenum on nationalities reportedly scheduled for early September is unlikely to improve significantly Moscow's position. The draft party platform on nationalities policy published on 17 August emphasizes the rights of smaller minorities such as the Abkhaz. If the plenum adopts such language, particularly if it curtails the rights of the union republics to impose republic-wide language or cultural policies, it will almost certainly inflame tensions. Georgians also probably will be alarmed by the draft's emphasis on the need to solve the special problems of, among other groups, the Meskhetians--who, the Georgians fear, may be resettled in Georgia. At the same time, a firm signal to the Abkhazians and other small minority groups that political autonomy outside the union republic structure is not an option could assuage Georgian sensibilities about the dismemberment of their republic, thus improving Moscow's image at the margin. [redacted]

Over the long term, the prospects for Moscow's position in Georgia are brighter, provided that progress continues toward vesting broad and genuine authority in republic political and economic institutions--that is, making good on Gorbachev's promise of

~~SECRET~~ [redacted]

economic and political decentralization of the Union. Although the terminus of such a course would be well short of complete independence, it could do much to disarm radical nationalists and increase the odds for the emergence of strong representative local institutions and a stable and pro-Soviet Georgia. [redacted]

~~SECRET~~ [redacted]



## Annex 1: The Abkhazian-Georgian Conflict

In mid-July of this year ethnic clashes between Georgians and Abkhazians erupted in the Abkhaz ASSR over the ASSR's territorial status. Ethnic Abkhazians, who make up only 17% of the population of the ASSR but who dominate the region's political hierarchy, renewed demands for Abkhazia's secession from the Georgian republic and incorporation into the Russian republic. This request, which Moscow and Tbilisi have consistently denied, surfaced in the 1970s and again in March 1989, precipitating the Georgian demonstrations in Tbilisi that resulted in the 9 April killings. At that time, the first secretary of the ASSR was replaced. [redacted]

Probably because tensions in the republic are still high over the 9 April killings, which Georgians blame indirectly on the Abkhazian issue, renewed Abkhaz demands for secession triggered clashes between Abkhazians and Georgians living in the Abkhaz ASSR. The first clash between the two groups killed 17, wounded over 400, and forced local industries to close. Despite the presence of over 4,500 MVD internal troops in the region, over 3,000 of whom were called to the region following the first attack, extremists--probably from both sides--armed with automatic rifles attacked railway systems and blocked roads, leaving hundreds of travellers stranded. As a result of increasing violence, which took at least three more lives, the Abkhazian leadership declared a "special situation," a condition just short of martial law, and imposed a republic-wide curfew. Georgian nationalists called a for general strike to protest continuing violence in Abkhazia. The strike was called off the next day after the party apparatus of the Abkhaz obkom (regional party committee) was purged. Among the changes was the replacement of the oblast Council of Ministers Chairman, who apparently is an ethnic Abkhazian, with a Georgian who had formerly served as a Georgian Central Committee secretary--indicating the importance the republic leadership is placing on the region. [redacted]

During the outbreak of violence, point attacks on government installations became more frequent and extremists turned to more sophisticated weapons and tactics. Five bombings were reported in ethnic clashes between Georgians and Abkhazians in Georgia. The confrontations include a reported grenade attack on Georgian nationalist leaders in Tbilisi and the bombing of a Georgian professor's home in Abkhazia. On 27 July, internal troops killed a sniper who allegedly was using a submachinegun, the only reported resort to lethal force by MVD troops in Abkhazia. [redacted]

Tactics used by both sides shifted in the course of the conflict from random brawls to the use of high-powered weapons. Focussed attacks on individuals such as those on Georgian nationalist leaders suggest that groups of extremists with some sophistication in terrorist tactics and strong political motivations have coalesced. Both sides appear to have easy access to explosives, possibly through the regional mining industry, and are armed with submachine guns and other high-powered weapons raided from regional security installations. Attacks on major transportation systems and the Inguri hydro-electric station have added to the turmoil in the region. [redacted]

## ANNEX 2

### GEORGIAN PARTY TURNOVER

Ethnic unrest in Georgia has prompted major personnel turnovers in the party apparatus since April. Virtually the entire top leadership has been replaced, along with a number of lower level officials. The complete overhaul of Georgia's party leadership follows the pattern established last year in Armenia and Azerbaijan, when widespread ethnic unrest in those republics led to sweeping replacements. Transcaucasus Military District Commander I. Rodionov also was replaced in August, probably in an attempt to mollify Georgians who blame him for the 9 April killings.

#### Top-Level Georgian Appointments Since April\*

Post**	Previously Held By	When Replaced	Reason Replaced	Replaced By
Abkhaz Party Chief	B.V. Adleyba	06 April	Endorsed Abkhazian demands for secession	Y.F. Khishba
First Secretary	D.I. Patiashvili	14 April	Implicated in 9 April killings	G.G. Gumbaridze
Chairman, Council of Ministers	Z.I. Chkheidze	14 April	Implicated in 9 April killings	N.A. Chitanava
Republic KGB Chief	G.G. Gumbaridze	30 April	Promoted to First Secretary	T. V. Lordkipanidze
Second Secretary	B.V. Nikolskiy	18 June	Implicated in 9 April killings	A. Yu. Pavshentsev
Commander, Transcaucasus Military District	I.N. Rodionov	July	Implicated in 9 April killings	V.A. Patrikeyev

\* Republic President Otar Cherkaziya offered to resign at the 14 April plenum, but his request has not yet been considered by the republic Supreme Soviet.

\*\* All posts mentioned in chart except Transcaucasus Military District Commander are Georgian Communist Party positions.

### Annex 3: The Georgian Supreme Soviet Commission

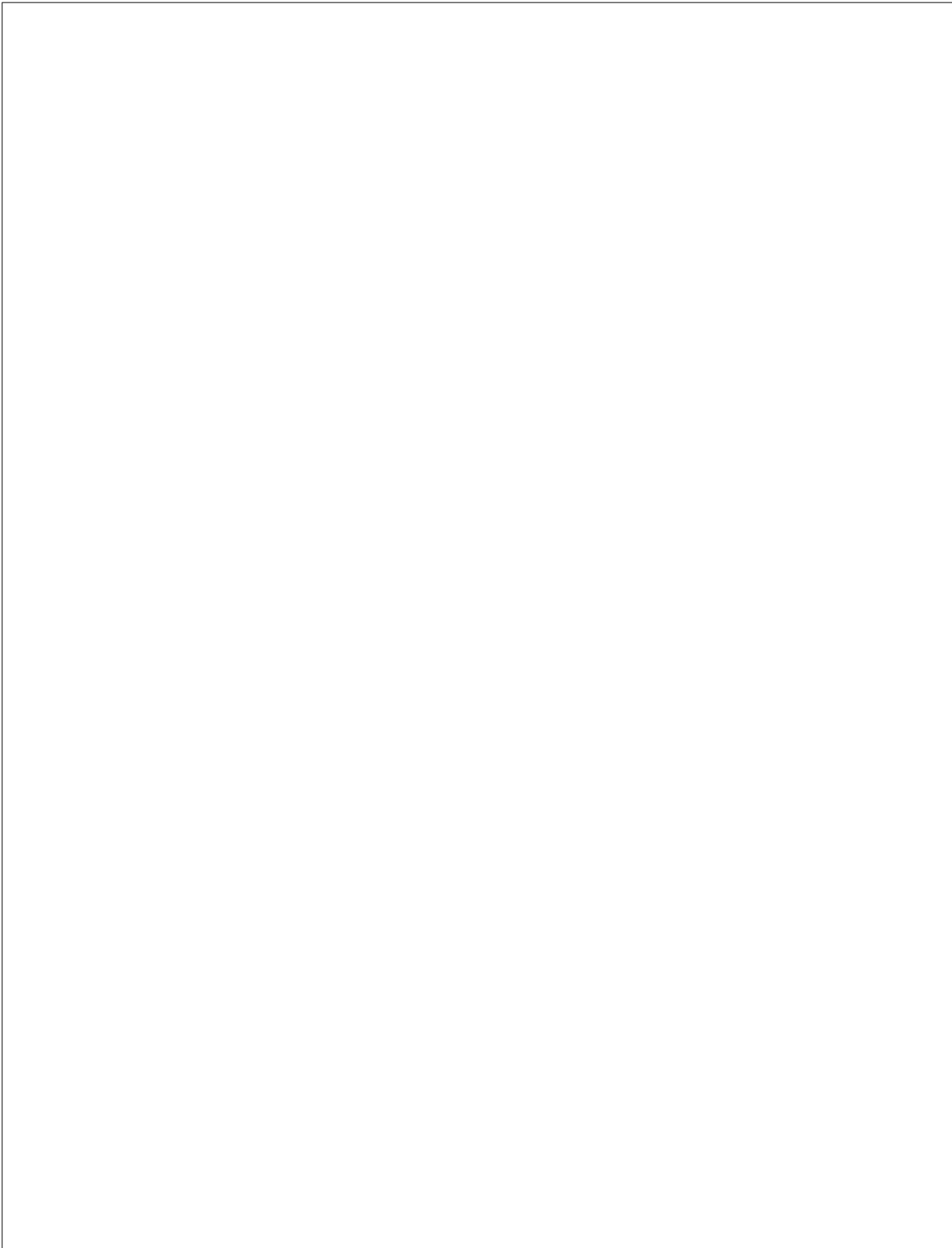
The Georgian Supreme Soviet commission investigating the deaths of 20 demonstrators and civilians in Tbilisi on 9 April published its preliminary report in the Georgian party and government daily Zarya Vostoka on 11 June. The report, citing excessive use of force, sharply criticized the military, and specifically General Rodionov, then commander of the Transcaucasus Military District, who, it concluded, was responsible for both regular army and internal (MVD) troops on the scene. The report contradicted military allegations that the demonstration had turned violent and concluded that the troops had attacked both demonstrators and local militia brutally and without warning. It noted that MVD troops had used "toxic chemicals"--the medical subcommission named chloroacetophenone (CN) and dinitrochlorobenzomalononic acid (CS)--whose identity the military had refused to reveal to medical staffs trying to treat the victims. [REDACTED]

The commission report attacked military and MVD actions on legal as well as moral grounds. It stated that the use of army troops in Tbilisi was illegal because the appropriate body--the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium--had not declared martial law. It also concluded that the army and MVD units used weapons and gas in violation of statutes on the use of weapons by security forces and that attacks on demonstrators and militia were criminal actions. [REDACTED]

The commission report strongly implicated both the republic and central leadership in the decision to send in troops illegally. The report cited former Georgian First Secretary Patiashvili's testimony at the Congress of People's Deputies that the republic leadership had requested the introduction of army and MVD troops into Tbilisi, but also noted that Rodionov and First Deputy Defense Minister Kochetov, who arrived in Tbilisi before the attack, had assured a republic Central Committee bureau session that only shields and billy clubs would be used during the dispersal. While it shied away from directly assessing Moscow's responsibility, the report pointed out that Patiashvili had discussed the situation with Kochetov and "some CPSU Central Committee leaders." (Patiashvili, while falling short of suggesting that Moscow was giving orders, in his testimony had implicated party secretaries Razumovskiy and Chebrikov, as well as Defense Minister Yazov.) The report also pointed out that the Minister of Internal Affairs had to authorize the deployment of MVD troops to Tbilisi. [REDACTED]

The report concluded that the main motive for the attack was a Stalinist desire to "punish" demonstrators for expressing the desire to secede from the Soviet Union. It also noted that the Georgian leadership apparently was additionally motivated by a desire to keep in power a corrupt system that permitted self-enrichment and a fear of being exposed as corrupt. The report called for the improvement of rules for the conduct of rallies and of interethnic relations. It ended with a call to reexamine the treaty that created the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in December 1922, arguing that it does not grant republics the right to determine their own social, economic, and demographic policies. It did not, however, suggest a desire for Georgian independence. [REDACTED]

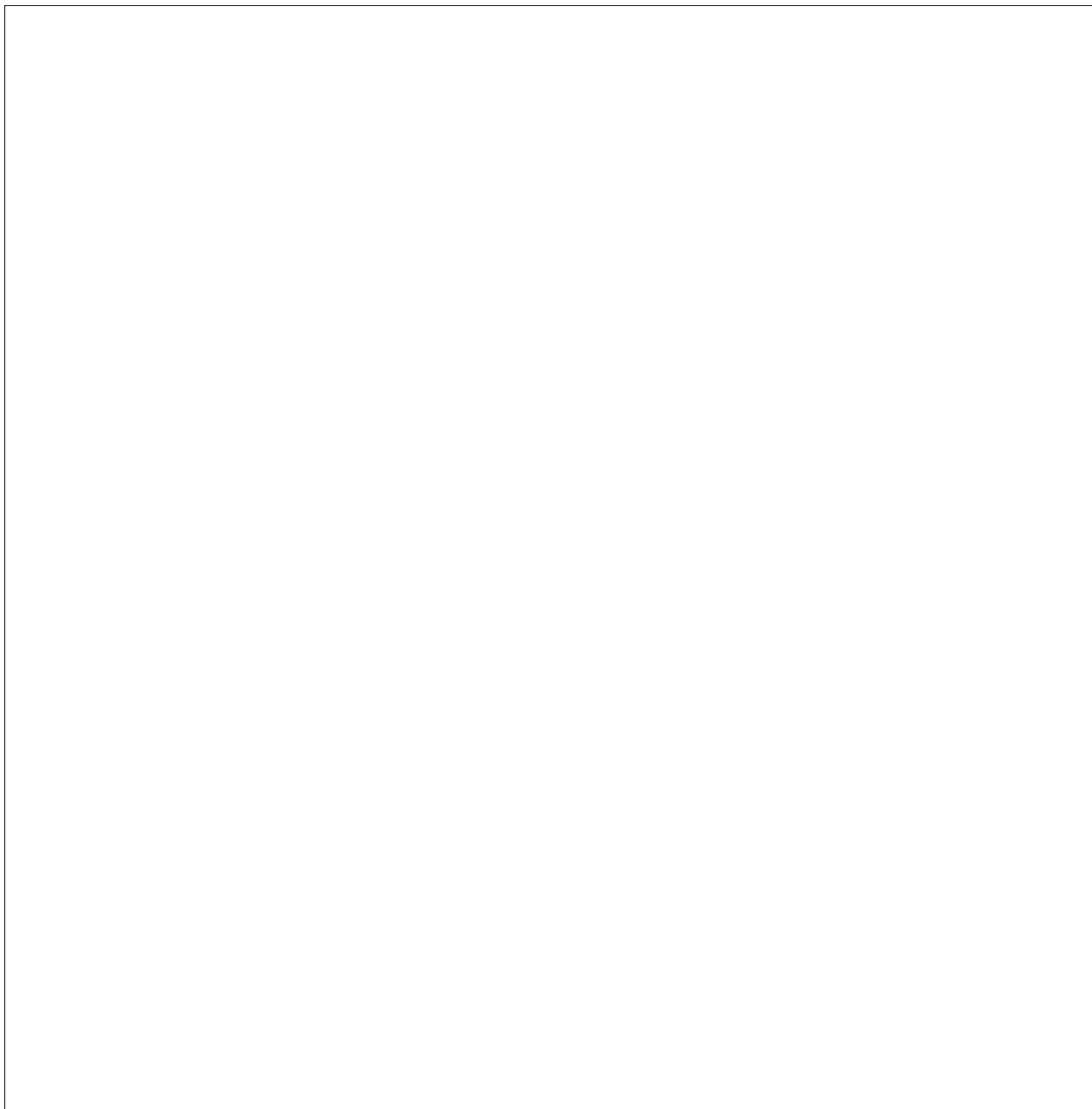
~~SECRET~~



~~SECRET~~



~~SECRET~~



~~SECRET~~



~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~